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UNKNOWN DEAD

A Decoration Day Address

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I take great pleasure in dedicating this Decoration Day address to my fellow citizen

GEORGE H. TILTON, Esq.

to whose patriotism and munificence the town of Littleton, N. H., is indebted for one of the most impressive Soldiers' Monuments I have ever seen.

John Edgar Johnson.

The Unknown Dead.

The leading purpose for which the Grand Army was organized, as set forth in its first prospectus, was the annual decoration of the graves of Union Soldiers. No such organization had ever existed before, or could have existed before, for the simple reason that nowhere in history is there any record of soldiers having been carefully buried in separate graves, with headstones to mark them, until the United States Government made such provision for its fallen heroes in the War for the Union. All the soldiers of Alexander the Great; all the soldiers of Cæsar; all of those of Charlemagne, and of Napoleon were buried in unknown graves. Three thousand of General Washington's soldiers died and were buried that winter at Valley Forge, but only two graves are now pointed out there, and one of these is of a commissioned officer and the other is of a dog. The round globe itself is a vast mauso-

leum to the Unknown Dead—and old ocean is another.

But at the close of our Civil War the National Government not only gathered upon the battlefields of the South the remains of all Northern soldiers that could be identified, and had them re-interred in various cemeteries reverently set apart for that purpose, but it also erected in the great cemetery at Arlington Heights, near Washington, a profoundly impressive monument to "The Unknown Dead," beneath which lie buried the miscellaneous remains, impossible of identification, of a great number of those who fell fighting for liberty and their native land.

I suppose it was that Memorial which suggested so many of a like character all over the country. Visitors at Arlington invariably stand with bowed head beside it, and the tears of a sympathetic nation have fallen here as scarcely anywhere else on the continent. It appeals to the pity and the pathos and the patriotism of the Nation.

And now I venture to call attention

to a distinction, not too fine perhaps, which may be drawn between "nameless graves" and "unknown dead."

Uncertainty attaches itself more particularly to the living than it does to the dead. Death is revelation. At death the scales drop from our eyes. We leave our death-mask behind us when we pass out of the body. Yonder we stand exposed and confessed to ourselves, to our fellow-men and to our Creator.

We are sometimes asked if we believe we shall recognize our friends in another world. Why we are never sure of them until we get there.

A monument to an "Unknown God," or to "Unknown Friends," I can understand, but a monument to the "Unknown Dead" is a misnomer. What does it signify whether the dead are unknown *to us* or not. The sun in the heavens is unknown to a mole in your garden. Here we see through a glass darkly; yonder they see face to face. Here we know in part; there they know even as they are known. The

things we now see are fleeting shadows; the things seen beyond the veil are the substantial facts and eternal verities of the universe.

We talk much, for instance, about the Grand Army. Where is it? Is this the Grand Army; this corporal's guard of old men who once a year feebly grope their way to the graves of their comrades all over the country to decorate them with flowers? Ah, no! They are the Rear Guard of a great host who have marched on ahead. The Grand Army has passed over. It has forded the river and pitched its tents on the grand camping grounds beyond the grave.

There is a pious legend of an old monk who, wasted by fasting, sought the chapel of his monastery one day late in Lent, and there, with others, engaged in meditations. The walls of the chapel were covered with frescoes illustrating its history from its foundation centuries before. Among the figures there were not a few of those who had

fought the good fight of faith and purchased the halo of the saint.

Overcome by his austerities, the aged man half fainted; passed, in fact, into the state of coma. He seemed to himself to be disembodied. He saw his own figure and those of his companions around him, like so many marble statues fixed and lifeless, while the frescoed images on the walls appeared to be moving about and conversing with one another.

He was soon discovered in his swoon, and carried to his cell, where he was resuscitated.

Now on Decoration Day old soldiers "dream dreams and see visions." Everything inverts itself. The earth mirrors itself in the skies. The Grand Army is on high, looking down upon us. They are the living heroes, and we are the lifeless figures on the ground.

When, from time to time, the roll is called up yonder, they who are there are reckoned "present." We who are here are "absent" or "missing," or, perchance, we may be written down as

of whereabouts unknown or as unaccounted for.

But we, too, are moving onward and upward. We shall soon join the main column.

And what a day it will be over there when the "last survivor," as we lifeless mortals sometimes foolishly phrase it, shall cross over, ascend the bank on the other side, and close the long roll call with his "*Here!*"

Will it be in the feeble squeaking voice of an old man—a Veteran—or will it be in trumpet tones, echoing and re-echoing along all the arches of the universe?

I love to think of this "last man," clad once more in immortal youth, mounting up on high, leading captivity captive, falling into line and filling the last gap in the serried ranks of the reunited Union Army. That will be a Reunion and Review the glory of which is beyond the power of the imagination to conceive.

What a scene it will be! All heaven will be there to behold it. In the fore-

ground will stand Father Abraham waiting to clasp this last man by the hand.

General Grant will be there, and the "silent man" will find his tongue, at last and shout "Hosannah!" General Sherman will be there—Old Tecumseh—who could talk almost as well as he could fight. He will "make a few remarks," no doubt. General Sheridan will be there—"Fighting Phil"—half horse and half man; as near a centaur as anything ever was.

General Custer will be there. How well we remember him at the Great Review at Washington at the close of the war. As he approached the grand-stand his horse ran away with him—back along the lines. He conquered it, and when he came up again (his long, yellow hair streaming over his shoulders) and saluted the President and the rest of the reviewing officers, what a yell rent the air from that vast multitude. I can hear it now, although it is many a day since I last heard even the roll of heaven's artillery in a thunder-

storm. That was, indeed the Grand Army.

But as the ranks thin here they swell yonder, and the Final Review and Reunion is not far distant.

How the banners will wave on that great day! How the flags will flutter! How the drums will roll! How the fifes will shriek! How the bands will play "When Johnnie Comes Marching Home"!

Then "the peace which passeth all understanding" will settle down upon the universe.

"The war drums will throb no longer and the battleflags will be furled." There will be no more death and no more darkness, but all will be life and light unending.

We shall see eye to eye finally and forever; and there will be no "Unknown Dead," for we shall all have arrived, at last, in "The Land of the Living."

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